

Message Text

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TO ALL DIPLOMATIC POSTS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, VN, US

SUBJECT: U.S.-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS: PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION

1. DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN ANNOUNCED ON FEBRUARY 25 THAT
PRESIDENT CARTER HAS NAMED A FIVE MEMBER COMMISSION LED BY
U.A.W. PRESIDENT LEONARD WOODCOCK, TO TRAVEL TO
SOUTHEAST ASIA IN MID-MARCH FOR THE PURPOSE OF ASSISTING
IN SEEKING AN ACCOUNTING FOR OUR MISSING PERSONNEL. BELOW
IS TEXT OF DEPARTMENT'S STATEMENT:

BEGIN TEXT:

DURING HIS CAMPAIGN AND AFTERWARD THE PRESIDENT EXPRESSED
HIS DEEP AND CONTINUING CONCERN ABOUT MISSING AMERICANS
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. IN KEEPING WITH THAT CONCERN, HE IS
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SENDING A PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION OF DISTINGUISHED AMERICANS TO SOUTHEAST ASIA TO HELP HIM OBTAIN AN ACCOUNTING OF THESE PERSONNEL.

THE FIVE MEMBER COMMISSION WILL BE HEADED BY LEONARD WOODCOCK, PRESIDENT OF THE UAW. THE COMMISSION WILL GO TO HANOI TO MEET WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SOCIALIST

REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM TO SEEK INFORMATION ON OUR PERSONNEL,

INCLUDING THE RETURN OF RECOVERABLE REMAINS. THE COMMISSION WILL ALSO BE PREPARED TO RECEIVE FROM THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT THEIR VIEWS ON MATTERS AFFECTING OUR MUTUAL RELATIONS. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM HAS AGREED TO ACCEPT THE COMMISSION'S VISIT.

UPON ITS RETURN THE COMMISSION WILL REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT. WE ARE ALSO IN CONTACT WITH THE LAO PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC TO ARRANGE A SIMILAR VISIT TO THAT COUNTRY.

IN SEEKING AN ACCOUNTING WE WILL MAKE CLEAR THAT WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT ALL AMERICANS LOST IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, OUR SERVICEMEN AND CIVILIANS, THOSE STILL LISTED AS MISSING AS WELL AS THE LARGER NUMBER WHO HAVE BEEN PRESUMED DEAD WITH NO ACCOUNTING BEING PROVIDED. THE FACT THAT A MAN HAS BEEN DECLARED DEAD FOR LEGAL PURPOSES DOES NOT AFFECT OUR DETERMINATION TO SEEK INFORMATION ABOUT HIM AND TO ARRANGE FOR THE RETURN OF HIS REMAINS IF THEY CAN BE RECOVERED.

THIS IS A FURTHER, MEASURED STEP WE ARE TAKING TO PUT THE INDOCHINA CONFLICT BEHIND US AND TO ESTABLISH MORE NORMAL RELATIONS BETWEEN OURSELVES AND THE COUNTRIES OF THAT AREA. THE FAMILIES OF OUR MISSING HAVE SUFFERED LONG ENOUGH, ALONG WITH OUR NATION. WE HOPE WE WILL SOON HAVE THE ACCOUNTING THAT WE SEEK SO THAT THIS HUMANITARIAN PROBLEM CAN BE CONCLUDED.

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END TEXT.

P. Q'S AND A'S PREPARED FOR USE BY SPOKESMAN FEB. 25 WERE ASKED AND ANSWERED ESSENTIALLY AS GIVEN BELOW:

Q: YOUR STATEMENT ANNOUNCING THIS COMMISSION REFERS ONLY TO ITS MANDATE TO SEEK A FURTHER ACCOUNTING FOR OUR MIAS. WILL THE COMMISSION BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS OTHER ISSUES -- FOR EXAMPLE THE VIETNAMESE CLAIM FOR ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE?

A: THE PURPOSE OF THE COMMISSION IS EXACTLY AS STATED IN THE ANNOUNCEMENT -- TO SEEK INFORMATION ON OUR PERSONNEL AND TO OBTAIN REMAINS IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, TO REVIEW OTHER ASPECTS OF OUR MUTUAL RELATIONS, AND THEN TO REPORT BACK TO THE PRESIDENT SO HE CAN SEE WHAT ADDITIONAL STEPS MAY BE DESIRABLE. OBVIOUSLY, THIS WILL NOT BE A MONOLOGUE. THE COMMISSION WILL BE PREPARED TO LISTEN TO THE VIETNAMESE ON MATTERS OF CONCERN TO THEM.

Q: DOES THAT MEAN YOU ARE PREPARED TO SERIOUSLY CONSIDER REQUESTS FOR AID?

A: AS YOU KNOW, CURRENT LEGISLATION PROHIBITS SUCH AID AND WE THEREFORE HAVE NO PLANS IN THAT REGARD.

Q: WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THIS COMMISSION WILL HAVE ANY MORE LUCK WITH THE VIETNAMESE THAN THE PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATION HAD AT ITS MEETING IN PARIS?

A: I AM CERTAINLY NOT GOING TO MAKE ANY PREDICTIONS. HOWEVER, THE MEMBERS OF THIS COMMISSION WILL BE GOING AS THE PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PRESIDENT, WHOSE COMMITMENT TO A RESOLUTION OF THE MIA ISSUE IS CLEAR-CUT AND UNEQUIVOCAL. WE WOULD HOPE THIS WOULD FIGURE PROMINENTLY IN THE THINKING OF THE VIETNAMESE AS THEY CONSIDER

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ER THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THIS ADMINISTRATION.

Q: HOW ABOUT UN MEMBERSHIP? WILL THE COMMISSION BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS THIS?

A: WE WOULD HOPE THIS ISSUE WOULD NOT COME UP UNTIL WE CAN MAKE SOME PROGRESS ON BILATERAL MATTERS.

Q: HOW MANY COMMISSION MEMBERS WILL THERE BE AND WHO WILL THEY BE?

A: THE PRESIDENT IS NOW IN THE PROCESS OF SELECTING THOSE MEMBERS AND THEY WILL BE ANNOUNCED NEXT WEEK.

Q: WHICH OFFICIALS WILL ACCOMPANY THEM?

A: THEY WILL BE ACCCOMPANIED BY A SMALL STAFF OF STATE, DEFENSE, AND PERHAPS OTHER PERSONNEL.

Q: WHAT TIMEFRAME ARE YOU THINKING OF FOR THE DEPARTURE OF THE COMMISSION?

A: THEY WILL BE IN HANOI AROUND MID-MARCH.

Q: HAVE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS BEEN INFORMED OF THIS DEVELOPMENT.

A: YES, MEMBERS OF CONGRESS WERE INFORMED WHEN THE INITIAL APPROACH TO THE VIETNAMESE WAS BEING MADE, AND HAVE BEEN BROUGHT UP TO DATE AS WELL.

Q: HOW ABOUT CAMBODIA? WHY ISN'T THE COMMISSION GOING THERE?

A: THE PROSPECT FOR CAMBODIAN COOPERATION ON MIAS AT THIS TIME IS NOT ENCOURAGING AND WE FELT THAT THE COMMISSION
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SHOULD FOCUS ON VIETNAM AND LAOS FIRST WHERE THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL UNACCOUNTED FOR IS THE GREATEST. (MIA/KIA CAMBODIA NUMBER 80 OUT OF 2550 TOTAL).

Q: WHEN DID YOU COMMUNICATE WITH THE VIETNAMESE ON THIS AND CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE METHODS USED?

A: THE SECRETARY SENT A MESSAGE TO THE VIETNAMESE FOREIGN MINISTER EARLY IN FEBRUARY PROPOSING SUCH A COMMISSION AND THE VIETNAMESE RESPONDED FAVORABLY WITHIN THE PAST FEW DAYS.

3. SPOKESMAN ALSO VOLUNTEERED COMMENTS ALONG FOLLOWING LINES: WE OF COURSE ARE PREPARED TO CONTINUE TO APPROVE SHIPMENTS OF PRIVATE HUMANITARIAN AID TO VIETNAM -- WE HAVE, FOR EXAMPLE, JUST RECENTLY APPROVED A LICENSE FOR 400,000 DOLLARS WORTH OF RICE TO BE SHIPPED TO VIETNAM BY A PRIVATE AMERICAN ORGANIZATION. YOU SHOULD ALSO BE AWARE THAT WE HAVE TAKEN OTHER STEPS TO MOVE TOWARDS A MORE NORMAL RELATIONSHIP WITH VIETNAM. FOR EXAMPLE, WE INTERPOSED NO OBJECTION RECENTLY TO THE UNDP SETTING A \$44 MILLION FIVE-YEAR PLANNING FIGURE FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AID TO VIETNAM. WE OFFERED NO OBJECTION RECENTLY IN THE IAEA TO ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES WHICH IN EFFECT COULD LEAD TO VIETNAM'S MEMBERSHIP IN THAT ORGANIZATION.

4. IN ANSWER TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS, SPOKESMAN NOTED THAT LENGTH OF MISSION IS UNKNOWN, CONTACTS WITH SRV WERE CARRIED OUT IN PARIS, FIGURE OF 80 MIA/KIA IN CAMBODIA DOES INCLUDE CIVILIAN NEWSMEN.

5. AS APPROPRIATE, POSTS SHOULD DRAW UPON ABOVE IN CONVERSATIONS WITH HOST GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND OTHERS, EMPHASIZING THAT WE ARE TAKING THIS STEP AS A MEANS OF HELPING RESOLVE THE MIA QUESTION AND MOVING
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TOWARD NORMALIZATION OF U.S.-SRV RELATIONS.

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Message Attributes

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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
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